

Writing an Artist Statement That Connects

(Abridged from *Artrepreneurship: Sustaining the Creative Life*, by E. L. Kittredge)

The Task

Investing some time and creativity in a solid artist statement can yield tremendous rewards for you. This piece of writing reflects both you and your work. Written poorly, it distracts from your art. Written well, it becomes an investment that will continue to pay you dividends.

Your artist statement helps both to build broader awareness about you and to add value to your own artwork. Consider including information about:

- You, the artist. Help the viewer build a stronger picture of who you are.
- Your process of creating. Explain how the time spent in creating your work adds value.
- Your art and the big picture. Help the viewer gain a deeper understanding of your work.

Broad Suggestions

Consider applying the rule in journalism for writing the beginning paragraph of a newspaper story. A lead paragraph always needs to have a brief answer to the “Five W’s” of *who*, *what*, *when*, *why*, and *where*. Sometimes they throw in the *how*.

A strong artist’s statement clearly explains:

- Who are you as an artist?
- What kind of art do you make?
- Why do you make your art?
- Where do you make your art?
- When do you make your art?

Readers have short attention spans, only allowing you a very short span of time (perhaps a sentence or two) to grab their attention and get your point across. Make your first sentence the most compelling, a grabber.

Keys in Creating a Memorable Statement

- Insure that your artist’s statement is:
 - Concise.
 - Easily and quickly read.
 - Informative.
 - Possibly entertaining, but not overly clever.
 - Clearly organized so that your viewer doesn’t get lost.
- Use NO “artspeak.” Make your artist’s statement understandable for everyone. Artspeak” is gobbledygook that artists often use because they think it elevates their work.
- Keep verbs in the active, not passive, voice. Use action verbs which show confidence and strength of purpose.
- Avoid phrases like “I’m trying to...” or “I want to...” These constructions hint that you are waffling. Write about what you do.

- Avoid overusing “I” or “me”. Too many of those words can make it sound like the art world revolves around you.
- Keep your sentences short. People don’t read long chunks of text.
- Don’t rely on the jargon used in your particular medium. Although the reader will want specifics, too much minutiae will lose them.
- Avoid becoming too “mystical” in what you write. Everything that you write needs to be directly and clearly grounded in your art.
- Avoid flowery phrases, clichés, and generalities. This type of writing really says nothing, except to tell the reader how to feel or perceive. Describe, don’t tell.
- Avoid grammar and spelling errors. Writing involves building trust, and one of the best ways to build trust is to avoid grammar and spelling errors.
- Be aware of current trends while writing. Tie your statement and art to ideas currently in the public consciousness.
- You want to emphasize that your work is one-of-a-kind. The more special your work seems can be the trigger to someone investing in your art.
- Remember that you are telling a story – the story of your art. Insure that the first sentence of your statement grabs the reader.

Steps to Writing an Artist’s Statement

As you write, keep in mind that it is far better to end up with too much information and then trim it, than to not have enough information and have to go back to add in pieces. Keep all your notes and versions for future revisions.

Step 1. Brainstorm. Think about your audience and who will read this statement. Picture the person sitting across from you. Use words and phrases to express your feelings about your work. Ask a friend or group of trusted friends to help you brainstorm phrases. Don’t edit or analyze what they say; just quickly note their ideas.

Step 2. Create a draft. Now start weaving your ideas together to create a cohesive whole. At this stage you are going to write a three to four paragraph draft statement. As you write, remember to:

- Write in first person. (“I, me”)
- Use the active voice. (“I bought the candy,” not “The candy was bought by me.”)
- Use the present tense. (“I draw,” not “I drew.”)
- Be real and grounded.
- Be confident.

For each of the paragraphs below, write three to five sentences:

- Paragraph One. This introduction tells who you are and why you do what you do. It could be considered a warm up. Remember the Five W's.
- Paragraph Two. Discuss your materials, tools, and how your creative process works.
- Paragraph 3. Weave in the brand of your landscapes, physical and cultural, as the frame on which you build.
- Paragraph 4. What are you exploring by creating what you do now?

Step 3. Let it rest. Once you have written a draft, do not reread right away. Let it set for a week before you reread it. Don't let anyone else read it. Just let it sit and ripen.

Step 4. Edit. After a ripening period, your statement is ready for you to edit. Editing means more than simply correcting grammar or spelling errors. You may need to turn your statement inside out. Rewrite.

Step 5. Get a second opinion. What seems perfectly clear to you may puzzle others. Ask someone you trust to read the statement and provide comments. Ask specifically:

- Do they understand what you are trying to say?
- How does the piece make them feel and is it congruent with your art?
- Did they find technical errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation?

Rewrite.

Step 6. Use Your Statement. Date the original and make copies. Use it, knowing that each time you put your statement out to the public, you extend your network and build relationships.

Prepare three kinds of statements and have them ready:

- A one-sentence, 25-30 word statement.
- A one to two paragraph statement for a show or portfolio. Each paragraph may have from 50 to 100 words in it.
- A multiple paragraph, 300-500 word piece that could be included as part of a catalogue.

Don't Think It Is Ever Done.

Your artist's statement is a living document. It evolves with your art, changes as you change, shifts as the circumstances in which it is used shift. What you write today is not carved in stone.

A final thought. Writing a strong artist statement is a creative process and there is no magic formula to follow. Just as you would never expect to follow a format or kit for the art you create, so your artist statement rises from inside you.